



THE FINAL HIGHLAND FLING

(The last Black Spot)

It is not often that Scotland and England combine together in a common purpose (World Games and Olympics apart)

But it was a privilege and a pleasure to be included in the Scottish Trip abroad this year arranged by Mairi & John Frew, as a *Sassenach* to be welcomed with open arms with a hug and a friendly smile when us southerners gathered at Hull to join the Coach for the trip to Holland and Germany on 22 March. It did not seem like two years ago when we last gathered, it was like meeting an old friend who you only just left yesterday (Boy how time flies) there were some familiar faces, but a few newbies who were making their first trip - I cast my mind back six years when I joined the group for the first time, you were not allowed to be an outcast even if you did come from south of the border. One of the most enjoyable parts of the trip (apart from buying a few plants) is the friendly banter and repartee with all the other participants.

When the Coach arrived it was nice to see Kevin the same driver as previous trips (he had come out of retirement especially for this trip). When all were aboard the coach we managed to get through the normal passport control without any problems and boarded The Pride of Rotterdam for the 9pm sailing and spent a pleasant night after the evening meal socializing and reminiscing in the bars.

Friday soon came and we gathered to depart after a good breakfast for the onward journey (I should say at this point that your correspondent got mistaken for one of the many England Football fans who were travelling to Amsterdam for the International friendly) I would not have minded but it's the wrong shape ball for me! Anyway my encapsulation delayed the departure of the bus (so I was duly told off by the "Boss" the traditional **Black Spot** came later!) but onward with anticipation our first stop a new one for us at Gerrit Melissen greenhouse. He is well know to those who attend ELK and normally has good choice of plants so the expectation was at a high. An orderly procession duly formed and most acquired

some nice plants. Our next stop was at Lexmond at Hans Bisheuvél's as many know he is a well know in the Cactus world for his very large clogs. He had his normal selection of choice between plants he had acquired from other collectors and his own home grown ones, He actually had some plants from the collection of Endelmann (who some may remember from the past). Onward journey through Holland and Germany to our destination for our three night stay at the Rheine Hotel, at Andernach. Freddie our host was his normal eccentric self (sadly his mother had past away since our last visit) but that did not appear to quell his warm welcome. All were duly accommodated and our purchases of the day taken to the renowned cellar. Our evening meals were arranged at the nearby Rheinkrone Hotel, during the evening whether it was the Scottish influence, but we had an appearance of the "Robbie Burns spider", which was duly gathered up and excluded from the party. The evening concluded back at Freddie's over coffee, some of the party retiring early.

Saturday dawned and the normal trip into Andernach to the bakers in town after breakfast to get sustenance for the next day's journey (you were not allowed to make a "Pack Up " from the supplied material at Breakfast) on the Orders of the Boss and possible exclusion from the coach. Our day was to include three stops so those that wanted to make the trip took off for our first destination of Ingo Breuer (Eden Plants) Heinsberg. Mairi had concocted a number a "fun quizzes" to pass the time between stops on all of the journeys and the passing round of the traditional Sweetie Jar (all to be wrapped pleased). Ingo has a number of greenhouses only one of which is open for sales, the sliding benches were a challenge but no one got squashed, he shares the nursery space so there was a good choice of both Cacti & Succulents (your correspondent had anticipated a lot of Haworthias and was not disappointed) the near by Ice-cream shop was sadly closed. So onward to a private collection of Michael Pley (another attendee at ELK) who had invited us to come, a small greenhouse on two levels with a limited number of sales plants, however he had acquired some plants from Wolfgang Plein (so the Mammillaria collectors were in their element) access had to be in a rota due to limited space, anticipation caused yours truly to trip over fortunately no damage to me or any plants (take more water with it was the order). Our last stop was to Jeorg Piltz at Duren again we had had a special invitation to go, even if you don't buy anything his private collection is marvellous and worth the journey on its own. Back to Andernach for our evening meal, the evening was interrupted by a special presentation to John Galvin (York Branch) of the Societies AOM by Jim Gibbs. Some of the evening was spent in the cellar packing up our

purchases although there was still time to share a coffee or beer before retiring.



John Galvin receives his AOM

(photo Shelia Gibbs)

Sunday is the traditional trip to Kakteenland at Steinfeld a long journey but very picturesque, Mairi & John have had a long association with the Founder Karl Beisel and his family over the years they have visited their premises, which is now being run by his daughter Kim so we were greeted very warmly with hugs and the complimentary glass of wine. As reported before this is a vast complex and shopping trollies are supplied for you, some of the party went to investigate the Storks, which nest in the grounds, whilst other visited the Café and took advantage of a lovely warm day sitting outside chatting till it was sadly time to depart. The return journey by the side of the Rhine is very scenic and we had enough time to take a short break at Boppard to stretch the legs (this brought back memories for me of a visit I made with a school group) It did not seem that much had changed over the years, still the chocolate box houses. During the evening meal proceedings were halted for a special presentation to Mairi & John of an engraved glass plaque - they had both decided that this was sadly going to be the last trip they arranged having taken over the organisation from Ian Lawrie and Irene Duffy over 20 years ago so a fitting reminder of lots of memories of past adventures. The rest of the evening was the normal packing up of our purchases into boxes to be assembled for the trip home (I am not sure if the local flower

beds will ever recover from the additional material that is deposited during our stay).



The special presentation to Mairi & John

Monday came all too soon and with everything being expertly stowed into the bus we bid a fond farewell to Freddie and ventured homeward. We had a long journey back to the Ferry and two scheduled visits in Honselersdijk taking a short break on route (for comfort of passengers and driver). Stopping off at Van der Linden's massive commercial nursery and on to Aad Vijverberg's before boarding the ferry back home. The evening was spent reminiscing over many years of the trip, sadness that this was to be the last of an era and the demise of the **Order of the Black Spot**. Although I personally have not been part of this happy throng for long others have been and it's always sad when such an experience comes to an end, but there are lots of memories and exploits in the history and it only remains to thank Mairi & John for being part of the experience and wish them all the best for the future. Adieu

Bill Darbon

P.S. " Thank you to everyone who has made these trips such a pleasure for us and we hope it was as enjoyable for you as it has been for us. Mairi & John Frew"

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